

The Freeport Debate

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The Lincoln-Douglas Debates were a series of political debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas for one of Illinois' two U. S. Senate seats. Ranging between seven towns, the debates were scattered throughout Illinois, the second debate being in Freeport on August 27, 1858. During the Freeport debate, controversial subjects such as slavery and the Freeport doctrine emerged. Ideas and the opinions of the delegates' views were brought up, which eventually influenced the development of the United States. The debate that took place in Freeport, almost 150 years from now, was an important factor in showing the candidates' position on slavery, contributing to the final outcome of these candidates' future.

Throughout the Freeport debate, both Lincoln and Douglas discussed their significant ideas about various subjects, mainly dealing with slavery. Trying to be subtle, as not to anger or offend citizens who were for slavery, Lincoln expressed his view against slavery when discussing the District of Columbia. He said, "I have my mind very distinctly made up. I should be exceedingly glad to see slavery abolished in the District of Columbia." Though Lincoln was against slavery, he added his belief that a person had the right to own their own slaves. Douglas had a similar view on slavery. His main point was that whether the people wanted, or did not want, slavery, it was their ultimate decision through the lawful government. This was the Freeport doctrine. Lincoln asked if the people of a territory can, by lawful means, exclude slavery from their territory prior to the formation of a state constitution." It is evident that both Lincoln and Douglas

opposed slavery, but Douglas believed it was the people's ultimate decision whether slavery was abolished or not. Stephen Douglas' idea of the Freeport doctrine, and each delegate's view on slavery, were significant ideas that came out of the Freeport debate.

The ideas that emerged from the Freeport debate later influenced developments in America. Many southerners opposed the Freeport doctrine created by Douglas because they did not want there to be a chance of slavery being abolished. Lincoln, on the other hand, was well spoken with practical beliefs with which many people agreed. Even though Lincoln did not win the campaign for the Senate seat, he developed a good reputation and number of followers when he ran for the presidency. Because Southerners did not oppose Lincoln, he was elected president over Douglas. Through his term, Lincoln outlawed the growth of slavery in the nation. Even though he ultimately lost, the Freeport debate was a significant moment for Lincoln, because he gained popularity, resulting in one of America's greatest presidents.

Lincoln and Douglas both voiced their beliefs in the Freeport debate. Both were against slavery, but each had a different approach to it. Douglas made it clear he was against slavery through his speech and ideas. It became clear to the Southerners he wanted slavery to end. Lincoln took a more subtle approach. A historian, Lawanda Cox, wrote that "there is not mistaking the fact that he considered the unequal treatment of free blacks an injustice." Though Lincoln believed slavery was wrong, he was very subtle about this in the Freeport debate so as not to upset slave owners. Cox said, "Lincoln's emotion as well as his sense of justice were stirred by the inequality to which white prejudice subjected blacks." He stated he was against slavery only once during his speech, he mostly kept his opinions to himself. He believed only the people had the

power to end slavery. Though they had different strategies in doing so, both Douglas and Lincoln voiced their beliefs in the Freeport debate.

The Freeport debate was one of seven debates in Illinois between Stephen A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln. In a year, these debates will have taken place 150 years ago. Through the Freeport debate each debater supported significant ideas, which influenced the development of the United States. Even though Lincoln ultimately lost the campaign for the Senate seat, the Freeport debate was a significant moment for Lincoln, resulting in one of America's greatest presidents. Though it did not seem so at the time, this debate was a crucial step in America becoming slavery free. [From Gabor S. Boritt, ed., *The Historian's Lincoln*; Don E. Fehrenbacher, ed., *Abraham Lincoln*; and Benjamin P. Thomas, *Abraham Lincoln*.]